



## **"DISASTER AND AFTER"**

**What have Croatian libraries learned about preservation and disaster management after the war experience?**

**Damir Hasenay**

Ph.D., Associate Professor

[dhasenay@ffos.hr](mailto:dhasenay@ffos.hr)

**Maja Krtalic**

M.Sc., Research and Teaching Assistant

[mkrtalic@ffos.hr](mailto:mkrtalic@ffos.hr)

Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy,  
University of Osijek,  
Osijek, Croatia

**Meeting:**

**88. Preservation and Conservation, Preservation and Conservation  
Core Activity**

---

**WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 76TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY**

10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden

<http://www.ifla.org/en/ifla76>

---

### **Abstract:**

*Library collections today are facing many threats. Some of them have a slow but certain impact on library materials, others come suddenly and unexpectedly. No matter how the threats appear, or how they influence libraries, ability to safeguard and preserve their collections should always be sustainable. Regardless of what measures are taken to preserve collections, good organisation is the prerequisite for their efficiency. The key to achieving this goal lies in preservation management, policies that enable long-term planning and argumentative decision-making. One of the aspects of preservation planning is disaster management. Disaster management encompasses all management issues necessary to deal with incidents that threaten library buildings, collection, services and human lives. Disasters include natural catastrophes, floods, fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes, but also those caused by human effect such as war, armed conflict and terrorism. Technology dependent times bring new possible disasters. Changes in energy systems and lack of electricity supply endanger traditional library material but even more digital material that is useless without energy supply. It is evident that the future could bring many changes and the resources (mainly financial) necessary to preserve collections will become limited, so the prerequisite for sustainability of cultural heritage preservation is good organisation of available resources. The key question that motivated this work is how libraries that already faced consequences of disaster altered their preservation management practice. The 1991-1995 war in Croatia destroyed many libraries and their collections. The conclusions given in the Croatian*

*professional literature of the 1990s showed unpreparedness and lack of disaster management. Are Croatian libraries today, twenty years later, better prepared? The aim of this work is to investigate the state of preservation management and disaster management policies and practice of Croatian libraries.*

**Key words:** *preservation, preservation management, disaster management, libraries, Croatia*

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 2.

Preservation in its essence is a management issue. The purpose of preservation management, like any other management, is the most efficient use of available resources to accomplish desired goals and improve excellence. Preservation management can be defined as systematic and planned organization of human and financial resources as well as necessary activities to insure longevity and availability of library material, regarding the mission of the certain institution. Understanding the mission of the institution, its users' needs and specific characteristics of library collection will set the framework for making preservation decisions. Efficient preservation is based on the assumption that preservation is an integral part of library management in general and as such it should be incorporated into all library activities and be a task of every member of the staff. However, that is not always the case. Preservation management encompasses different aspects such as: strategic planning, financial planning, legal aspects, education and raising awareness about the preservation issues, transmission and application of theoretical knowledge, operative aspects of everyday handling of books, technical and material issues, and least but not last cultural and social aspects of preservation, memory institutions and cultural heritage. All of these aspects should be taken into account when dealing with preservation issues.

One of the aspects of preservation management is the disaster management. Disasters includes natural catastrophes such as floods, fires, earthquakes and hurricanes, but also those caused by human effect such as war, armed conflict and terrorism. Although disaster manifests as a set of mutually conditioned and connected causes of damage, they usually destroy by fire and water, and as such their consequences are severe. Disasters come more or less unexpected, but that does not mean that libraries should not be to a certain degree prepared to react and deal with consequences. Management has especially important role when it comes to dealing with disasters. Disaster management encompasses all management issues necessary to deal with incidents that threaten library buildings, collections, services and human lives (Matthews, Eden 1996; Matthews, Feather 2003). These issues are grouped around basic elements of disaster management such as risk assessment, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (IFLA Principles). There is a great importance of the planned approach to dealing with disasters of any kind that endanger cultural heritage, both on national and international level. Although the disaster management issues are understood and recognized as important (unfortunately often as the result of disasters that have already happened), its principles are still rarely systematically applied in practice. There are three key words that underline the preservation issues - systematic, comprehensive and sustainable.

### **3. PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN CROATIA**

#### **4.**

It is considered that preservation of library materials as a professional issue in Croatian library practice and literature starts to develop in 1950s when Central Laboratory for Restoration and Conservation in Croatian State Archives was founded. At that time preservation in Croatia follows contemporary trends and good practice. The topic of preservation enters the professional literature and it is mostly devoted to technical aspect of preservation. After 1980s the field of preservation stops following achievements and changes until recent years when digital preservation comes into focus of interest. That resulted in the absence of important knowledge and examples of good practice when it comes to preservation management, preventive preservation, planning, collection condition surveys etc. The literature from 1990s partly brought preservation in the centre of interest and focused at the war catastrophes, burned libraries and the way libraries dealt with that. Today, preservation of library material in Croatia is rather underdeveloped field that reflects many problems on national and institutional levels. Some of the main issues are lack of national preservation strategy, lack of defined responsibility for dealing with preservation issues on national level, no financing model for preservation, lack of preservation literature in Croatian language, small number of expensive restoration laboratories. National library as a centre of Croatian library system that should manage and implement national preservation issues fails to conduct its role when it comes to preservation. On the institutional level, the main problem is a misunderstanding of preservation as a technical issue and task of specially educated conservators and restorers, not librarians. Preservation is not seen as a part of general library management, and it is considered as an expensive and staff and time consuming process that should be conducted only in those libraries that have rare and old collections. In such circumstances it is presumed that when preservation management lacks in general, disaster management policies and practice will lack to. But, since the libraries in Croatia went through the war, it was presumed that it should have effected their library management and that there is a better awareness of disaster management issues.

The war in Croatia was fought in the period of 1991-1995 between two republics of former Yugoslavia, Serbia who wanted ethno-territorial expansion and Croatia who sought independence and sovereignty and defended its present-day borders and territorial integrity from the attack. It was an aggression against Croatia with severe consequences. During that time many library and archives material suffered many direct and indirect war damages. Since cultural heritage is closely connected with history, memory and identity of a certain nation, it is often the target for destruction in wars and conflicts (Sturges, Rosenberg 1999, Riedlmayer, 2007). Direct damages were caused by bombardment and looting that comes together with fires and floods. Many library materials were damaged due to the indirect consequences such as inappropriate evacuation and storage (in damp basements, grave, even septic tanks). Professional literature in the second half of the 1990s deals intensively with these issues (VBH 1992, Aparac-Gazivoda, Katalenac 1993, Musnjak 1994, Musnjak 1999). It is necessary to state that the whole Croatian library system at that time was affected by war consequences: interrupted acquisition, especially subscription to foreign periodicals, insufficient funds, reduced number of staff, not enough IT knowledge and support in libraries and very little IT equipment, interrupted information services, poor communication and coordination between libraries, difficult working conditions, decrease in user number in war-affected areas but increase of users that were refugees in areas that were not affected by the war, book loss due to unreturned loans etc. In these circumstances, preservation was one of the aspects of library management that needed attention. But since preservation was never

seen as an integral part of library management, libraries were not prepared enough to act preventively and to react in case of disasters, especially dealing with very little staff left to do the assignments. Some libraries were efficient, some were not. It leads to a conclusion that efficiency was more the result of 'luck' or coincidental circumstances, or personal ability of staff to react in the given situation, than the result of in advance organised and thoughtful reaction. On the national level Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments created a preservation and evacuation plan but public libraries were not included in it, only memorial libraries. "At the beginning of the war in Croatia there were no clear guidelines about what to do and when. Evacuation of the library might seem as the best solution, but there were many problems connected with it [...] not to mention the fact that it might be interpreted as showing the lack of patriotism. Therefore, librarians were left to their own devices and judgement." (Petr, 2003: 179).

There were several issues in safeguarding library collections during the war in Croatia that were detected afterwards and presented in the professional literature:

- Law priority of libraries and its holdings in general war situation;
- Unpreparedness and belief that the disaster will not happen in the end;
- Decision making and selection criteria - whether to evacuate, when, where, how and what to evacuate?;
- Lack of evacuation places appropriate for library material;
- Reduced number of staff;
- Lack of basic preservation equipment in libraries;
- Not enough knowledge or awareness about condition in which library materials were evacuated;
- Lack of preventive plans and lack of disaster management created in times of peace in most libraries;
- In some libraries counter disaster plans existed but they were not feasible in the end due to the lack of staff, or badly chosen places for evacuation;
- Slow response after the war has stopped, to preserve and restore remaining collections.

The early 1990s were a difficult time period for Croatian libraries caused by heavy war destruction after which came years of political and economical transition so they brought many challenges for libraries. In the post war period, many destroyed libraries received help from other libraries in the country as well as from individuals and international institutions, and in time restored their normal function. The main question is whether their experience altered their management practice, especially preservation management and disaster management.

## **2.1. Aim and purpose of the study**

The aim of the study was to determine whether Croatian libraries apply disaster management, taking into account the earlier given basic assumptions of preservation and disaster management. Since Croatian libraries have experienced, directly or indirectly, consequences of disasters brought by the war in the 1990s, basic presumption was that the given experience affected their relation to preservation and counter disaster planning, and that they have altered their management practice since then. The purpose of the study was to find out if going through a certain experience affects library's ability to cope with potential disasters and insure sustainability of its collections and services.

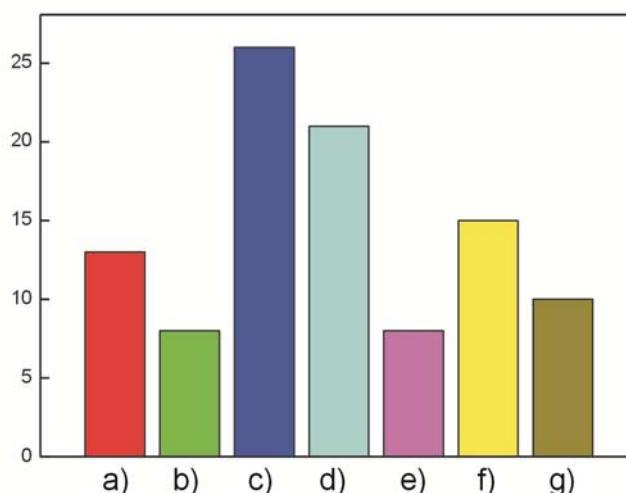
## 2.2. Methodology

Data were gathered using a questionnaire as an instrument. A sample included 54 libraries out of which 39 examinees answered the questionnaire (72%). Planned sample included 21 central county public libraries out of which 15 answered (71%), 7 research libraries out of which 6 answered (86%), 6 university libraries out of which 2 answered (33%), 12 academic libraries out of which 10 answered (83%) and 10 school libraries out of which 6 answered (60%). Other 15 libraries, including the national library, did not answer the survey which can also be interpreted as a lack of understanding of the importance of the issue. The survey was conducted in April 2010. The eight questions in the questionnaire were designed in order to gather data that would be usable for achieving aim and purpose of the study.

## 2.3. Results and discussion

Looking at the overall number of answered questionnaires, the response was good and enabled us to gather data relevant for analyses in Croatian context. We find indicative and worrying that national library and larger number of university libraries did not answer the survey even after repeated requests.

The aim of the first question was to determine whether library has a disaster control plan and in what form. The results showed that 10 libraries (26%) do not have any kind of disaster control plan and 3 libraries (8%) do not know whether such plan exists in the institution (Fig. 1). Taken together that is the one third of answers.



a) library has an official written plan; b) library has internal plan; c) plan exists for the institution that library is a part of; d) library has an unofficial and unwritten plan; e) library does not know; f) library does not have a plan; g) other

**Fig. 1** – Disaster management planning

Only 5 libraries (13%) have an official written document that represents disaster control plan and 3 libraries (8%) have such plan in an unofficial form. Somewhat larger number of libraries that are a part of an institution, e.g. school or faculty library, has a written official plan on the institutional level. In this case it can be disputed whether library staff is acquainted with such plans. Relatively large number of libraries answered that they have an informal and unwritten disaster control plan, which means that the plan exists but only those

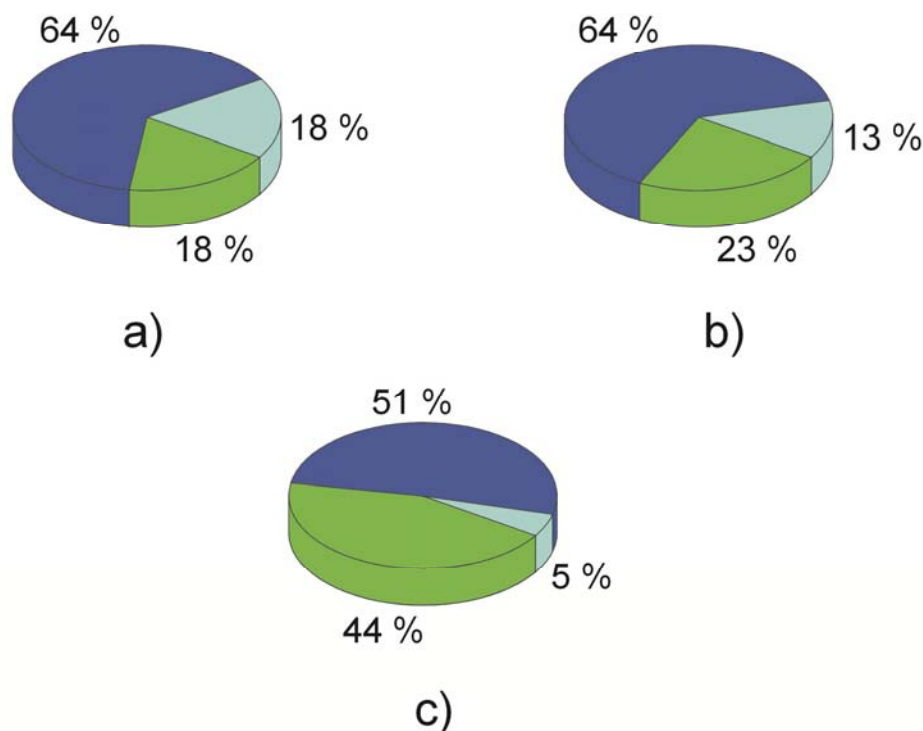
members of the staff that have considered it are aware of it. These data are not satisfactory given the fact that Croatian legal documents prescribe that such plans must be developed in every library. It is interesting that some libraries commented how this survey inspired them to think more about the importance of the disaster management issues, their legal obligation and expressed the need for help in creation of disaster control plan.

The second question consisted of several statements and required that examinees state their agreement. Very large number of libraries (no. 25 - 64%) associated their perception of disaster planning with financial issues. They agreed that substantial amount of financial resources should be invested in protection from disasters. It is interesting to notice how majority of libraries would invest financial resources, but only 5 libraries stated in the previous question that they have their own plan and know where to invest finances. It is also interesting that those libraries that have a written plan do not need more financial resources. The solution is visible in stimulating libraries to create a plan and articulate clearly their needs. Written plan is the prerequisite for reasonable investing of funds. On the other hand, it is comforting that 23 libraries (59%) recognized the need for education and help. It should be noticed that significant number of libraries (no. 18 - 46%) stated that its staff is acquainted with procedures in case of disaster. That confirms the awareness and willingness of library staff to be prepared.

The third question aimed at gathering data about disasters that have happened to libraries in the past. 14 libraries (36%) have experienced disasters that were the consequence of the war. From the additional comments in this question, it is evident that for some libraries war experience left the feeling of helplessness in a way that they did not recognize the need to plan and manage preservation in the future. It is interesting that also 14 libraries (36%), experienced vandalism and burglary. It shows that the human factor is present in both of these cases and was obviously the main cause in previous incidents. Also, it can be correlated with the previous question and considered if stated additional financial resources would make a significant difference here. Flood is the disaster that happened also in 14 libraries (36%), whether as a natural disaster (no. 9 – 23%) or caused by the human error (no. 5 - 13%). Fire (not caused by war destruction) happened in very small number of libraries (no. 2) and was caused by human error. Natural disasters happened only to one library and it was earthquake. Previous experiences show the known fact that disaster caused by human error are significant and should be considered carefully when planning and organising preservation measures.

The fourth question focused on possible causes of disaster. The results showed that many libraries deal with realistic potential threats from devastated buildings and lack of good infrastructure (no 10 – 26%). They are afraid of flood (no. 17 - 44%), fire (no. 15 – 38%) and burglary (no. 12 – 31%). It should be mentioned that this data are probably not based on risk assessment since the disaster management culture is not developed enough, but more on personal estimation. These results reflect the necessity for systematic risk assessment and the need to objectively recognize potential threats.

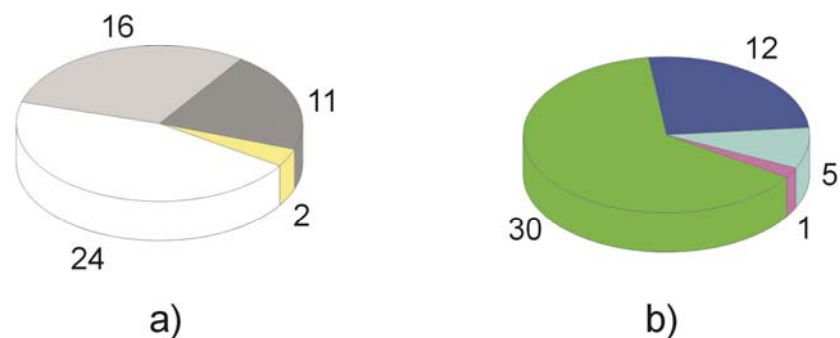
The fifth question correlated with past events that libraries have experienced and was asked to determine how past events have effected readiness of the staff, financial investments in equipment and infrastructure and allocation of overall financial resources to disaster prevention (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** – How past events have influenced: a) readiness of the staff; b) financial investments in equipment and infrastructure; c) allocation of overall financial resources to disaster prevention.

In all cases, majority of libraries answered that it had a partial influence (64% in Fig. 2a and 2b, 51% in Fig. 2c). Only small part answered that there were no influence or that it had absolute influence. When it comes to readiness of staff (Fig. 2a), 7 libraries (18%) answered that it had no influence and the same number recognized absolute influence. It was expected that those libraries that have experienced war disaster will have more prepared staff but this was not the case (only 29% of them have better prepared staff). Also, effect of disaster experience on financial investments in equipment and infrastructure (Fig. 2b) showed again that in 9 libraries (23%) it had no influence, while in only 5 libraries (13%), it had absolute influence. Certainly the most interesting result is the allocation of overall financial resources to disaster prevention (Fig. 2c), where in 17 libraries (44%) the previous experience had no effect, while only 2 libraries (5%) stated that it had completely influenced their management. It is evident from this that preservation is not recognized as an integral part of the general library management, because the resources given to preservation are very scarce and this kind of thinking and managing is not easily changed.

The sixth question focused on the obstacles to efficient counter disaster planning. This question offered the possibility of multiple answers. 24 libraries (62%) stated that finances are the main obstacle. 16 libraries (41%) sees the organization and education as the main obstacle, while only 11 libraries (28%) sees the infrastructure as a major obstacle (Fig. 3a). This data reflect a specific way of thinking about preservation issues and their feasibility.



**Fig. 3** – a) Obstacles to disaster management (number of answers): 24 – finances; 16 – organization and education; 11 – infrastructure; 2 – no obstacles.  
b) Investment that library would make if it had available resources for disaster prevention (number of answers): 30 – infrastructure; 12 – education of staff; 5 – planning; 1 – no need for investment.

Last question focused on the investment that library would make if it had available resources for disaster prevention (Fig. 3b). Very large number of libraries (no. 30 – 77%) would invest into infrastructure (repairing the building and installation, equipment etc.). 12 libraries (31%) would invest into education of staff, while only 5 (13%) would invest into planning. Planning is obviously underestimated, but investment into infrastructure correlates with realistic danger that comes from old or damaged buildings stated in the earlier question. Only one library is completely satisfied with its disaster preparedness and does not have the need to invest into improvements. This library however was completely destroyed by fire in the war. This is the good example of the awareness that should probably exist in other libraries as well.

From additional comments it is evident that libraries feel that they are left alone in these issues and that their founders as well as national bodies should share the responsibility and show the initiative to improve overall conditions, especially in raising awareness, planning and education.

### 3. Conclusion

Croatian libraries have experienced direct and indirect consequences of disasters caused by the war in 1990s. However, this did not sufficiently change their preservation and disaster management practice. This can be connected with the general perception of preservation that is seen as a technical issue, very staff and time consuming and financially demanding process. Data gathered in presented survey show that large numbers of libraries recognize problems that arise from unsuitable buildings and lack of necessary equipment, but they do not recognize the benefits of efficient disaster management. According to this, the first step should be raising the awareness and education about the importance of disaster management issues as a prerequisite for efficient, comprehensive and sustainable preservation of their services and collections.



## References

1. Aparac-Gazivoda, T. and Katalenac, D. (1993) *Wounded libraries in Croatia*, Zagreb: Croatian Library Association.
2. Matthews, G. and Eden, P. (1996) *Disaster management in British libraries. Project report with guidelines for library managers*, London: The British Library.
3. Matthews, G. and Feather, J. (eds) (2003) *Disaster management for libraries and archives*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
4. Mušnjak, T. (1994) 'The protection of archival material in war conditions', *Arhivski Vjesnik [Journal of Archives]* 37, 79-86.
5. Mušnjak, T. (1999) 'Neizravne ratne štete na pisanoj baštini nastale tijekom domovinskog rata' [Indirect war damages of written heritage made during the Homeland war], *Arhivski vjesnik [Journal of Archives]* 42, 255-287.
6. Petr, K. (2003) The Croatian experience 1991-1995, *Disaster and after: the practicalities of information service in times of war and other catastrophes*, London: Taylor Graham.
7. Riedlmayer, A. (2007) 'Crimes of war, crimes of peace: destruction of libraries during and after the Balkan wars of the 1990s', *Library Trends* 1 (56), 107-132.
8. Sturges, P. and Rosenberg, D. (eds) (1999) *Disaster and after: the practicalities of information service in times of war and other catastrophes*, London: Taylor Graham.
9. *Vjesnik bibliotekara Hrvatske [Journal of Croatian Librarians]* (1992), 3-4 (35), 1-97. – thematic issue